

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: 7/15/2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner

ADDRESS: 1700 K Street NW

APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 13 tables and 26 seats

Site Information

Zone: C-4

Historic District: No

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Downtown commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on June 2, 2010. The café is for the adjacent Kellari Taverna restaurant.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy T-2.4.4: Sidewalk Obstructions

Locate sidewalk cafes and other intrusions into the sidewalk so that they do not present impediments to safe and efficient pedestrian passage. Maintain sidewalk surfaces and elevations so that disabled or elderly pedestrians can safely use them. 410.8

Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space

Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the “activation” of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas.

Policy UD-3.10: Sidewalk Cafes

Discourage the enclosure of sidewalk cafes in manner that effectively transforms them into indoor floor space. The design of sidewalk cafes should be compatible with the architectural qualities of the adjoining buildings, should complement the street environment, and should not impede pedestrian movement.

KEY ISSUES

The property is located Downtown on K Street, NW, between 17th Street and Connecticut Avenue, NW. It is located in an area zoned C-4. There is high level of pedestrian activity during working hours and a medium level of pedestrian activity at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as commercial.

The sidewalk where the proposed café is located is along K Street and is 17'-6" wide. The adjacent business has no shop window projection. There are 5 feet at the curb set aside for tree boxes and other street furniture. This leaves 12'-6" to accommodate pedestrians and café seating. The application is for a seating area that includes 13 tables and 26 seats in an area that is 335 square feet.

However, 230 of that square feet is on private property and only 105 square feet of the seating is in public space and requires a public space permit. The proposed seating in public space includes 6 tables and 12.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 2'-6''. This leaves 10 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the furniture zone at the curb. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk cafe. In the central downtown area it is particularly important to maintain at least a 10' clear pedestrian path.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 105 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 7 seats; the application is for 12 seats.

A raised deck is proposed for the sidewalk café. The raised deck extends the restaurant into public space in such a way that it privatizes the area and makes it appear to be an extension of the building. The raised deck should not extend into the public space and seating in public space should be at grade with the sidewalk. In addition, a fence is proposed around the perimeter of the café. The proposed fence is 38'' in height. The fence needs to be removable so that it can be removed when the café is not in use.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial areas. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. However, the number of seats needs to be reduced according to the amount of square footage. Also the proposed raised deck for the seating is not appropriate in public space as it causes the public space to appear as an extension of the adjacent building. In addition, the fence needs to be removable.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the conditions that the sidewalk café in public space has a maximum of 7 seats and they be located on the sidewalk. In addition, the fence can be a maximum of 42'', be fifty percent open, and should be removable.